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SUBJECT: KING EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN
THE REGION

REF: JEDDAH 449 AND 450

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) During Ambassador Khalilzad's recent visit to the Kingdom (reftels), King Abdullah talked at length about SAG concerns about the influence exerted by Iran and its surrogates in Iraq and the region. King Abdullah told his guests that "justice is missing" in Iraq, and that there is "no equity" between the factions there. He said that Iran covets Iraq, and its agents are there intentionally to ensure this disparity continues.

¶2. (S) The King said that Iran was attempting to make the U.S. yield in Iraq, but that this was an "impossibility"; now that the U.S. was in Iraq, it could not allow itself to be humiliated. He stated that "whatever is in Iraq's interest is in Saudi Arabia's and the region's interest." He continued, saying that, "It is important to deter Iran, and let people know their true identities. We have heard that some people believe that Iran is the key country in the Arab and Muslim world. This is not true or possible. It is a fact that the two holiest Islamic sites reside in the Kingdom. The call upon the Muslim world can only come from Saudi Arabia, not from others." The King stated that he had warned Iran that if it attempted to proselytize in Iraq, it would endanger its status in the Muslim world.

¶3. (S) King Abdullah explained that true Islam is based on the foundations of moderation and maintenance of balance, and that Saudi Arabia, as the true Islamic regime, is upholding this principle and maintaining balance between different factions in Iraq. He added that Saudi Arabia did not want to give special status to any one group.

¶4. (S) It was clear that the King's concerns involved not just Iran, but the Shi'a in the region. The King chided the Iranian Shi'a for worshipping "domes, statues, and individuals," stating that worshipping anything but God was wrong. He said that "these individuals are waiting for the return of the Mahdi (note: in reference to the 12th and final imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who the Shi'a believe will reappear and establish absolute justice throughout the world. endnote), and they want to be called masters." He added pointedly that "it is an insult that they (Shi'a) give income to imams. How can anyone expect an imam to lead the nation if imams are asking for something instead of providing for their people?" He stated emphatically that, "If Iran wants

anything from the Muslim world, they must come and ask for it."

¶5. (S) A Regional Arms Race: Commenting on Iran's nuclear pursuit, King Abdullah stated that he had warned Iran about the dangerous consequences of acquiring nuclear weapons, and that doing so would trigger a regional arms race. He added that although the KSA believes in peace, stability and constructive dialogue, Iran must understand how dangerous this situation is.

¶6. (S) Comment: The King's candid remarks are an indication of the level of seriousness with which he views the Iranian threat and influence in the region. His remarks about the possibility that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons may spark a regional arms race are of great importance and echo the views of other senior Saudi leaders. End Comment.
OBERWETTER